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APHASIA.*

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It will be remembered that I last year read a paper on aphasia, which I had hoped would elicit some useful discussion, for the affection is certainly one of much interest, not only to the attentive student of psychology and the pathological anatomist, but indeed to the general practitioner of medicine; nor is its occurrence perhaps so rare as to warrant the conclusion that it may with propriety, or professional advantage, be relegated to the domain of the profitless unknown. There are, in my belief, very few medical practitioners of prolonged observance and discreet attention, who have not, in the course of years, met with cases of speech disorder, which must have led them to desire the attainment of a more intimate acquaintance with the literature of cerebral physiology and pathology, than they had previously regarded as deserving of serious consideration, or, I might perhaps, with more justice say, as adequate compensation for the expenditure of those fragments of time which the exigencies of professional duties leave at their disposal, and which they find less than sufficient for the further study of subjects of every day imperative importance. I confess, however, that when, last year, I found, that after finishing my reading, not a single member present moved a lip, either in corroboration or in disapproval of the contents of my paper, I was quite undecided as to whether I should feel more mortified, or disappointed. If the association was mercifully condoning my intrusion, by the charity of its silence, it was most consistent with sound discretion, to reciprocate the charity. When our friends may be so forbearing and generous as to

abstain from adverting to our failures or foibles, it would be a sorry return for their tender kindness, to attribute their reticence either to lack of discernment or want of social frankness. I did, however, reach the conclusion, that my paper, either from its own demerits, or from the unsuitability of its subject, had failed to interest the audience, to the extent which I had hoped for, and I resolved to consign it to the limbo of the untimely. I therefore declined to accede to the request of a polite medical journalist who wished to present it in his columns, and when another gentleman whose professional ability is exceeded only by his urbanity, expressed his desire to have a reading of it, I had to reply that it was no longer among the findables. Both of these gentlemen assured me that I had judged erroneously of the silent verdict of my confrères, and as I had every reason to confide in their veracity and candour, I felt relieved from the obligation of my unspoken, though strongly purposed vow, never again to trespass on the patience, or the valuable time, of this association, with any matter or paper which I might fear would prove uninteresting or distasteful.

Having premised so much in honest explanation of my past fears and misapprehensions, I shall now, with as much brevity as the nature of my subject will permit, submit to your consideration the following observations:

The term aphasia, or absence of the faculty of speech, is of much wider range of application than may, at first view, by those who have not devoted much time to this branch of medical literature, be supposed. It has been only of recent years that physiologists, pathologists, and clinicians have devoted themselves to its earnest study, in connection with special cerebral conditions. It is true that many years ago Gall ventured to advance certain conceptions as to the relation between human language and particular parts of the brain, but unfortunately for the prestige of his theory, it was associated with a host of overlapping phrenological conjectures which proved repellent to scrupulous sober investigation. But long before the age of Gall the relation between the faculty of language and certain conditions of brain, had been observed, not only by physicians, but also by historians and naturalists. Hippocrates, Thucydides and Pliny have recorded instances of deprivation of speech, consequent on injuries to the brain.

*Read before the Ontario Medical Association, at Hamilton, 4th June, 1884.